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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001604

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/GAVITO/YERGER

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TAGS: [FAID](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: LEBANESE RESIDENTS NEAR NAHR-AL BARID
FEEL IGNORED BY GOL, BUT NOT USG

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Classified By: DCM WILLIAM GRANT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Summary: DCM and Emboffs met with mayors of municipalities located near the Nahr-Al Barid Palestinian refugee camp (NAB) during a trip to Tripoli October 9. The mayors praised the USG for its assistance to the local areas that were negatively affected by the 15-week battle at the camp, adding that GOL has transferred cash provided by Saudi Arabia and UAE but has not yet provided any direct assistance to local Lebanese. The mayors also worry that unemployed residents are becoming more susceptible to the ideologies of extremist groups such as Fatah-al-Islam (FAI) due to their economic downturns. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) continue to restrict some Lebanese families who have homes within the Palestinian camp from returning to their homes. They expressed concern that the poor economic conditions, combined with a lack of GOL assistance, may cause this Sunni area area of Lebanon, which supported the pro-western March 14 movement during the 2005 Cedar Revolution, to turn to the opposition in the next election. End Summary.

USG AID THE MOST MEANINGFUL FOR LEBANESE CITIZENS LIVING NEAR NAHR-AL BARID

¶2. (C) During an October 9 visit to Tripoli northern Lebanon, DCM and emboffs met with mayors or vice mayors of several small Lebanese communities which are near the Nahr al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp, as well as officials of a fishing cooperative in the same area whose members' fishing was severely disrupted by the fighting. The municipal officials expressed their appreciation for USG assistance, emphasizing that it has been "the only significant assistance provided specifically to the municipalities". USAID is currently implementing two long-term projects and one short-term program for Lebanese citizens residing around NAB camp. The long-term projects target development of the local agricultural and fishing industries, while the short-term OFDA-funded effort involved one time distribution of Ramadan food baskets to 1400 households.

¶3. (C) The mayor of Mhammara added that additional direct assistance had come from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which provided close to USD 800 for each

family, distributed by the GOL's High Relief Council (HRC), which manages domestic disaster assistance for the GOL. According to the mayor, assistance from the Saudis and Emirates may already have run out for many beneficiaries and these small cash donations only went to fisherman and limited number of displaced Lebanese citizens in need.

¶ 14. (C) According to the mayor, the GOL itself has provided no direct assistance to the Lebanese citizens residing around the camp. The HRC is still completing a comprehensive study of the area to see what type of GOL aid is needed and where. The entire area has been declared a disaster area and international donations were sought at a September 10 conference chaired by Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora.

UNEMPLOYMENT INCREASES SUSCEPTIBILITY TO TERROR GROUPS

¶ 15. (C) During a conversation about a USG funded program aimed towards developing the fishing industry in the North, the mayor of Mhammara said that unemployed fisherman and their destitute families are becoming increasingly susceptible to extremist groups such as Fatah-al-Islam (FAI). The mayor reported over USD 100,000 in lost earnings for local fisherman as a result of the fighting. More than 300 fishing boat owners operating in the area surrounding NAB, each employing 7 to 10 workers, have been out of commission since May. The mayor estimated that close to 10,000 people (fishermen and their relatives) have been affected by the fighting and he requested between USD 600 and USD 1,000 for each boat to get them operating again. DCM and Acting USAID Mission Director promised to look at the increased need for the affected fishermen. In addition to addressing the problems affecting the fishing sector, the mayors also wanted to focus on lowering the unemployment rate through improved

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job creation and placement plans. Unemployment among young people is over 30 percent and the average monthly wage in the Tripoli area is half the Lebanese national average, they said.

SOME LEBANESE CITIZENS UNABLE TO RETURN HOME

¶ 16. (C) A number of Lebanese citizens resided in a portion of the NAB Palestinian camp that falls within the municipality of Mhammara. During the fighting, up to 60 percent of the municipality's population were forced to evacuate by the LAF which declared the area a military zone. The LAF is slowly allowing some families to return to this part of the city. However, those Lebanese residents living within NAB and within the city of Mhammara have not been allowed to return to their homes, according to the city's mayor.

COMMENT

¶ 17. (C) Besides the impact on the Palestinians who had to evacuate Nahr al-Barid for the 15-week long battle there, thousands of Lebanese farmers, traders, and residents living nearby suffered disruption of their livelihoods because of this conflict. While the GOL has said it will help those Lebanese, it appears that so far it has only distributed Saudi and Emirati assistance to Lebanese residents. This Sunni area of northern Lebanon strongly supports the pro-western March 14 movement since the 2005 Cedar Revolution. If residents do not see assistance that it can attribute to the government or the March 14 movement, that support may weaken. End Comment.

FELTMAN